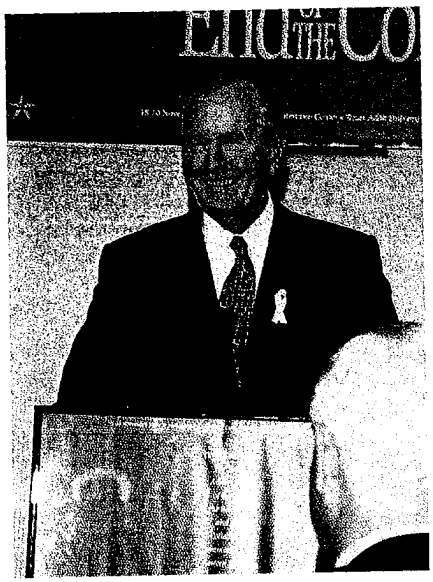
US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War

Henry R. Appelbaum and John H. Hedley



Former President George Bush

This article presents the highlights of speeches and panel presentations that—together with a document collection compiled by CIA Historian Benjamin B. Fischer—formed the core of a three-day conference on "US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War," held jointly with the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, 18-20 November 1999.

"In many ways we're still struggling to understand the importance of the events that transpired during the summer and the fall of 1989," former President and former Director of Central Intelligence George Bush told the nearly 400 people who attended the November 1999 conference on *US Intelligence and the End of the Cold War.* "But if the Cold War was an endless struggle against a relentless adversary, then CIA was certainly one of freedom's most vigilant defenders."

CIA's Center for the Study of Intelligence and the George Bush School of Government and Public Service co-sponsored the conference, which drew as participants DCI George Tenet and five of his predecessors—former President Bush, Ambassador Richard Helms, Judge William Webster, Dr. Robert Gates, and the Honorable R. James Woolsey—as well as other former senior intelligence officers from both sides of the Cold War. A number of former top US Government policymakers were also among the participants, including General Brent Scowcroft, President Bush's National Security Adviser, and Richard Cheney, the Bush Administration's Secretary of Defense. Others taking part included academic specialists on the Cold War, intelligence authors, and other interested citizens.

According to former President Bush, "none of us here—a layman like myself or the professionals—understood exactly when it would happen. But because of the knowledge that the intelligence community presented to the various Presidents, and because that knowledge led to keeping the United States of America strong, I think it was all but inevitable that that Wall eventually would come down." Speakers and panelists reflected on that historic event, and the role of US intelligence in connection with it during the conference.

Keynote Speakers

President George Bush

In his luncheon remarks on 19 November, former President Bush looked back at the turbulent and far-reaching changes in the world order that occurred during his presidency. He reiterated his admiration for the contributions of CIA and the rest of the Intelligence Community to US national security, and for the courage and resourcefulness of America's intelligence officers. He

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Conference Agenda

Welcome
- Robert Gates, Interim Dean, George Bush School of Government and Public Service

Keynote Speakers
- Former President George Bush, Former DCIs William Webster and Robert Gates, Gerald Seib, *The Wall Street Journal*

Panel I: Predicting the Collapse of the Soviet Union
- Gerald Haines, Chair; Bruce Berkowitz, Charles Gati, Douglas MacEachin, Thomas Powers, and Charles Wolf

Panel II: Intelligence and the Arms Race
- Howard Graves, Chair; James Woolsey, Stephen Hadley, Arnold Kanter, and Ronald Lehman

Panel III: Espionage and Counterintelligence
- James Olsen, Chair; Oleg Kalugin, Paul Redmond, and Allen Weinstein

Panel IV: Providing Intelligence to Policymakers
- Lloyd Salvetti, Chair; Robert Gates; David Jeremiah, Richard Kerr, Robert Kimmitt, and Paul Wolfowitz

Panel V: The Use of Intelligence by Policymakers
- George C. Edwards III, Chair; Richard Cheney, Brent Scowcroft, and William Webster

Memorial Ceremony
- George Bush; DCI George Tenet; former DCIs Richard Helms, William Webster, and Robert Gates; and Ryszard Kuklinski

Scholars' Roundtable
- H. W. Brands, Chair; Benjamin Fischer, Lloyd Gardner, Melvyn Leffler, and John Prados

credited his brief tour (1976-1977) as DCI as having underscored for him the value of intelligence and the need for it.

Excerpts:

- *There can be no substitute for the President's having the best possible intelligence in the world, which means we still must rely on the CIA and indeed the entire intelligence community.*

- *I know I leaned very hard on the CIA during my four years in office—four years when we saw our world change in profound ways as the Cold War ended, Eastern and Central Europe and the Baltics were liberated, and a democratic Russia started emerging. I wouldn't have wanted to try tackling any of the many issues we confronted without the input from the Intelligence Community. Not for one second.*

- *The PDB—the President's Daily Brief—was the first order of business on my calendar. I made it a point from day one to read the PDB in the presence of a CIA officer and either Brent [National Security Adviser Scowcroft] or his deputy. This way I could ask the briefers for more information on matters of critical interest, and consult with Brent on matters affecting policy.*

- *Conferences like this one, I believe, can serve a very useful purpose. The give and take on display here this week is exactly the kind of big-picture, long-range thinking we need to solve the many new questions that have emerged in the wake of the Cold War.*

Judge William Webster: Former DCI and Former Director of the FBI

Judge Webster, the speaker at the conference's opening dinner, refuted charges that US intelligence had failed to anticipate the collapse of the Soviet Union. He credited now-declassified National Intelligence Estimates with having played a "vital role" in helping several presidents maintain strong US

defenses while also reaching satisfactory agreements with the USSR on arms control.

Excerpts:

- *The evidence refutes the common charge, a charge that regrettably has already made its way into some history books—that US intelligence failed to apprise policymakers of the Soviet Union's grave economic problems.*

- *[National Intelligence Estimates] also refute the allegations that US intelligence failed to anticipate the collapse of Soviet power in eastern and central Europe, and then in the USSR itself.*

- *By early 1989, CIA was warning policymakers of the deepening crisis in the Soviet Union and the growing likelihood of an implosion of the old order. Perestroika meant "katastroika" for the Soviet system. In other words, Gorbachev's reforms were creating the opposite of their intended result. [CIA's warnings] convinced the Bush Administration to move quickly to seal as many advantageous agreements as possible with the Gorbachev government.*

- *I believe a careful examination of newly released documents shows that US intelligence contributed new information and insights that helped American policymakers bring the most protracted and most dangerous conflict of the 20th century to a peaceful end.*

Robert Gates: Interim Dean, The George Bush School of Government and Public Service

Former DCI Gates, the dinner speaker on 19 November, also rebutted charges that CIA failed to alert policymakers to indications of Soviet weakness and incipient collapse. In addition, while acknowledging shortcomings, he outlined some of the Agency's many successes and achievements during that period.

Excerpts:

- *CIA's [analytical] work on growing Soviet internal problems stands up far better in hindsight than criticism suggests.... [CIA analyst] Kay Oliver, briefing President Reagan in November 1985, [told him that] "we cannot foresee the time, but we can see the tendency eventually to confront the regime with challenges to its political control that it cannot contain." By 1987 CIA was warning policymakers of the deepening crisis in the Soviet Union and the growing likelihood of the collapse of the old order.*

- *Preventing surprise was CIA's mission, and with respect to the Soviet collapse, the Agency fulfilled that mission more than two years ahead of time.*

- *I sent a memo to President Bush on July 18, 1989, based on...reporting from CIA. It said, "The odds are growing that in the next year or two, there will be popular unrest, political turmoil, and/or official violence [that may add up to] significant political instability." With President Bush's express approval, that fall Brent [Scowcroft] and I established...a contingency planning effort to prepare for the possibility of a Soviet collapse.*

- *After Vietnam made the use of American military forces in the third world politically impossible at home, CIA became the primary instrument of successive Presidents and acted at their direction to maintain a decades-long policy of containment of the Soviet Union—a policy based on the premise that a Soviet Union denied the opportunity to expand influence and power outside its own borders would eventually collapse from its own internal contradictions.*

Gerald Seib: View from the Media

Journalist Gerald Seib of *The Wall Street Journal*, speaking at the concluding luncheon on 20 November, addressed the issue of how well the intelligence community's counterparts in the press anticipated the Soviet collapse. He said "I don't think we did that much better and maybe not all that much worse than anyone else did at seeing just how fast the end of the Cold War was coming." He noted some advantages—such as greater freedom of movement—that journalists often have over intelligence officers, as well as some disadvantages, such as generally more limited language skills and an infatuation with dissident intellectuals who are urbane and well read and who tend to speak English. Mr. Seib observed that these dissident intellectuals

sometimes were merely elitists themselves, and were not in touch with mass sentiment in the streets.

Excerpts

- *Depending on these kinds of voices left journalists unable to see in full enough detail two other forces that were being unleashed and that did much to accelerate the collapse of communism. The first was the rise of religious sentiment in Eastern Europe and the second was the rise of nationalist sentiment.*

- *In the end, journalists—perhaps like intelligence officials—suffered from one misperception. We tended to think that for the Cold War to end, Gorbachev personally had to succeed. And I think we had a harder time seeing that ultimately it was Gorbachev's personal failures, in some ways, and not his successes that would end the Soviet Union.*

Panel Discussions

On Predicting the Collapse of the Soviet Union

A common theme among presentations by most members of this panel consisted of their challenges to Senator Daniel Moynihan's claims that the CIA and the rest of the US intelligence community failed to anticipate the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in a costly and unnecessary US defense buildup. Author Bruce Berkowitz, for example, gave CIA's performance high marks, pointing out that the Agency's successes on this question ranged from detecting in the late 1970s that all was not well with the Soviet system, to providing, in the months preceding the actual collapse, "a series of clear markers that policymakers could use in determining how close the fall was, and what the likely outcome was going to be."

Former CIA Deputy Director for Intelligence Douglas MacEachin, noting that only from defense spending could Gorbachev get more money for critically needed long-term investment, said that "in June of 1988 we published a paper which concluded that there's a good chance he will do that. I'm sorry we didn't say it more strongly. We didn't say he definitely will. I would only say if you had asked Gorbachev in June of 1988, are you going to cut your defense substantially, he would have said, 'well, there's a good chance I will but I don't know yet.'"

Author Thomas Powers took a somewhat different approach, contending that most observers (including those at CIA) "understood that the unequal [East-West] struggle could not go on forever," but they "thought it would end in a war," not a Soviet collapse. Because such a war was anathema to most people, psychologically we had a very deep investment in believing that nothing was going to happen—forever."

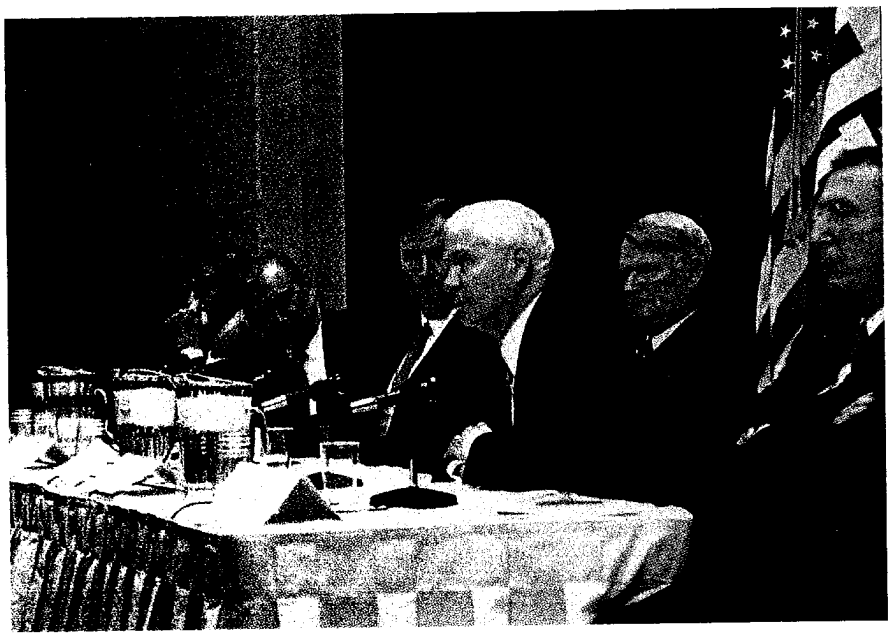
On Intelligence and the Arms Race

This panel examined the intelligence community's performance in providing intelligence on the former USSR to support US arms control negotiators. Panelists concluded that the intelligence agencies had performed well in covering most Soviet weapons systems; chemical weapons were cited as an exception. Panel members also gave recognition to the value of satellite imagery to US arms control strategists, particularly in the negotiations that resulted in the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement.

Former NSC Staff Director for Arms Control and Policy Arnold Kanter recalled that the intelligence community was, on the one hand, "very good at distinguishing...what they had to see and know, in order to make confident monitoring judgments" and, at the same time, "was very creative in helping to devise the provisions and procedures which gave [policymakers] what they needed, but still were negotiable with the Soviets. Very creative in threading that needle." Former DCI and CFE negotiator R. James Woolsey discussed the tactics he used to enable the US position to prevail in these negotiations. Woolsey also maintained that the ABM Treaty needed to be re-negotiated because one of the two nations to which it was to be applied no longer existed.

On Espionage and Counterintelligence

This group focused on Soviet and US Cold War intelligence and counterintelligence operations against each other. Panelists Paul Redmond, former CIA Associate Deputy Director for Operations/Counterintelligence—the Agency's highest counterintelligence post—and retired KGB General Oleg Kalugin exchanged good-humored boasts, barbs, and loaded questions



Panelists (left to right): Paul Wolfowitz, David Jeremiah, Robert Kimmitt, Richard Kerr, Robert Gates, and Lloyd Salvetti.

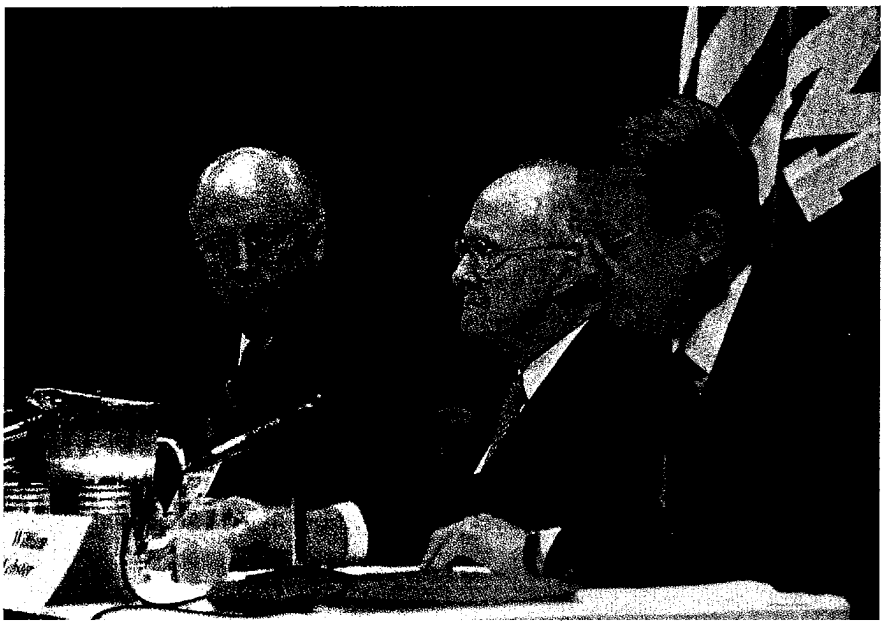
about their services' counterespionage activities against one another, prompting panel member Allen Weinstein to quip, "I did not realize I would be mediating a CIA-KGB Gong Show." Other subjects included a KGB allegation that US intelligence organizations had pursued a program to kidnap and murder Soviet operatives. Mr. Redmond declared, "we didn't, and we probably couldn't have pulled it off anyway." General Kalugin observed that "the Soviet mentality and experience shaped [Moscow's] view of the world—kidnapping, murder, lies—and we thought the other side was no better." Redmond spoke of a Soviet plan to kidnap US intelligence officers in Lebanon; Kalugin confirmed that there had been such a plot, but he said that at the last moment, then-Soviet leader Andropov "shouted into the telephone, 'Listen, stop it! Stop it! They will do the same to us, resulting in warfare among the intelligence services, and they [the West] have an advantage over us in many parts of the world.'"

On Providing Intelligence to Policymakers

CSI Director Lloyd Salvetti, in introducing the panelists, noted that they constituted, in effect, a re-creation of the Bush Administration's Deputies Committee. The panel consisted entirely of former members of that Committee, which was chaired by the deputy national security adviser (Dr. Gates held the post from 1989-1991). Other members included the number-two or number-three officials of four major entities—the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the CIA. Additional departments and agencies participated if topics on the agenda required their presence.

The panelists identified a variety of factors—including those related to intelligence—that made the Deputies Committee a critical forum in national security decisionmaking during President Bush's tenure. Dr. Gates noted, for example, that the panel consisted of people who respected, trusted, and could speak frankly with one another, and who approached the Committee's work in a collegial spirit. These were very senior people who could commit their department or agency and its leader, had the trust of and easy access to that leader, and could, in Dr. Gates's words, "strip away all of the bureaucratic baloney and get down to what was the really key issue" that the Committee and/or the President had to decide.

Panel Chair Salvetti observed that prior service in a variety of important policy posts was a thread connecting those who served on the Deputies Committee, a point alluded to by Robert Kimmitt, Under Secretary of State for Political



Panelists (left to right): Richard Cheney, Brent Scowcroft, William Webster.

Affairs in the Bush Administration, who represented the State Department on the Committee. Under Secretary Kimmitt noted that several Committee members had previously served at the assistant secretary level. Dr. Gates suggested that any new President, in assembling a national security team, should put a premium on bringing together people who have known each other and worked together at one time or another. Under Secretary Kimmitt endorsed this view, observing that intelligence often plays an especially important role in policy formulation early in an Administration, "where you have at most about a six-month window to put in place an effective policy foundation before events start to run away from you."

On The Use of Intelligence by Policymakers

The three panel members all commented favorably on the overall utility of intelligence to US policymakers. They also identified some weak spots. Former Secretary Cheney noted that "when I arrived at the Defense Department...the floodgates had opened. There was this enormous volume of material, and I had to find some way to...reduce it to manageable proportions." Although CIA's reports were "very good," according to Mr. Cheney, he also valued briefings from experts in the academic world as well as from CIA and other intelligence agencies on "what does this mean...[and] what should we be thinking about, and so forth." He added, "I think [the Bush Administration] was very, very well served on balance—that we got a lot of excellent analysis, a lot of it thought-provoking, that required us to really think about what we were doing and why."

General Scowcroft observed that decisionmakers often are faced with "ambiguity and lack of hard data;" thus, a key purpose of intelligence is to provide some key "concrete facts." And, he added, consumers generally have confidence in intelligence experts' facts and interpretations of those facts, but they tend to be more skeptical when it comes to intelligence officers' predictions. Judge Webster made a related point, noting that policymakers may be interested in our predictions but often will give preference to their own. Partly for this reason, according to the Judge, he found "a very clear preference among policymakers for current intelligence rather than Estimates." Webster also noted that it can be very difficult to obtain the human intelligence that is often the only way to get at our adversaries' intentions. General Scowcroft identified some other problems, such as analysts' "mind- sets" and the tendency to assume that foreign leaders reason as we do. These phenomena,

Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski with Texas A&M cadets.

he indicated, caused US intelligence to fail to forecast the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.

Scholars' Roundtable

The purpose of this final session was to have several scholars reflect on the entire conference, including speeches, panel discussions, and the conference volume titled *At Cold War's End: US Intelligence on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1989-1991*, prepared for the conference. Historian Benjamin Fischer prepared the book and commentary, which provided context for the conference, and consists of 24 declassified and released National Intelligence Estimates and CIA papers on the USSR that were written between 1989 and 1991.

The scholars on the panel, while praising the book and commending the CIA for making these documents available, urged that intelligence community agencies now move quickly to declassify and release additional material on this and other topics. They contended that such action is essential for scholars seeking to address such controversial matters as the intelligence agencies' performance in forecasting the collapse of the Soviet Union. Panelist and author John Prados, and others at the conference—noting that policymakers, according to General Scowcroft, preferred current intelligence to national estimates, singled out daily CIA analytical reports such as the tightly controlled *President's Daily Brief* as documents to which scholars need access if they are to gain an accurate, comprehensive understanding of the role of intelligence in the historic events of 1989-1991. Professor Melvyn Leffler contended that CIA's image of itself and its openness is not widely shared in the scholarly community or among the public at large. He argued that if "appropriate documents were opened," views of the CIA would eventually become less critical and more incisive about the utility and importance of intelligence in decisionmaking.

Memorial Ceremony

The conference culminated in a moving memorial service, "In Memory of Those Who Died That Others Might Be Free," which honored Americans as well as foreign agents who had lost their lives in the Cold War's "silent intelligence war." DCI George Tenet delivered the eulogy. The service was organized and conducted by the Texas A&M University Corps of Cadets, Band, and Singing Cadets. The ceremony also honored the memory of the Texas A&M students who died in the bonfire accident that occurred on the eve of the conference.

Also present at the memorial service as a speaker was Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski, a Polish army officer who had provided crucial

information on Warsaw Pact military plans to the West during the 1970s and early 1980s, before escaping to the West in late 1980. DCI Tenet called Colonel Kuklinski a "true hero of the Cold War, a man who risked great danger to work for us.... It is in great measure due to the bravery and sacrifice of patriots like Colonel Kuklinski that Poland and the other once-captive nations of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are now free." In his brief but moving response, Kuklinski responded that he was "deeply honored to represent my many anonymous comrades who served on both sides of the front line. I am pleased that our long, hard struggle has brought peace, freedom, and democracy not only to my country but to many other people as well."